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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

The Appeal of the Islamic Extremist Movement: Obligation to the *Umma*

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7 April 2004

The Basis of the Appeal (U)

The DCI Counterterrorist Center has developed a visual model of Sunni Islamic extremism, which can be used to explain its appeal to Muslims, including potential terrorist recruits.[1] The model, called the "Ziggurat of Zealotry," depicts the process that potential terrorists go through as they move from passive support of Muslim causes to participating in violence. The five levels of the Ziggurat represent distinct changes in their ideological beliefs (see figure).

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the importance of rhetoric at each level to persuade recruits to move up the Ziggurat. The appeal plays on an individual's feeling of obligation to the *umma*,[2] the worldwide Muslim community, which is depicted as being under attack. As one ascends the Ziggurat, the ideas of obligation, community, and threat evolve toward portraying violence as the only solution for perceived wrongs.

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Level One—Obligation To Support Those Who Defend the *Umma*

Occupants of level one of the Ziggurat may give monetary support to violent causes, such as the Palestinian *intifadah*, out of sympathy for fellow Muslims and a strong sense of loyalty to the *umma*. At level one, Muslims begin to think of themselves more as members of the *umma* and less as citizens of individual states.

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Individuals at this level do not join groups based on ideology—so there is no actual recruitment involved—but they are susceptible to the message that the *umma* is under attack, and therefore, one should contribute to the cause of those who are defending it.

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Our model suggests that the perception of threat to the *umma* has a direct impact on the number of people holding such views (the size of level one).

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[2] The Concise Dictionary of Islam defines *umma* as "A people, a community, or a nation, in particular the 'nation' of Islam, which transcends ethnic or political definition, at least traditionally and before the days of modern, Western-style nationalism." (U)

This report was prepared by the DCI Counterterrorist Center's Office of Terrorism Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,

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Level Two—Obligation To Propagate the Faith
Level two marks the critical transition from passive support of Muslims to active service to fulfill one's obligation to the *umma*. Level two is dominated by *"da'wa"* or "call" organizations, such as missionary or proselytizing groups that stress an individual's obligation to propagate the faith.

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The size of level two is affected by the same factors active at level one—primarily a sense of threat to the *umma*—with the addition of new influences, including:

- The organizational ability, scope, and freedom of activity of the *da'wa* organizations.
- Lack of economic opportunity, which increases the probability that young people will turn to *da'wa* organizations, where they may be exposed to recruiters from higher levels of the Ziggurat.

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Level Three—Collective Obligation To Defend the *Umma*
Groups at level three believe that the only way to defend the *umma* is by replacing corrupt regimes with Islamic states. They are willing to use either political means or violence to accomplish their goals. At this level—which includes the international mujahidin movement and self-described Islamic parties—the obligation to the *umma* includes a **collective duty** to defend the faith through jihad (a collective duty means that if some Muslims perform the duty, others are exempt).

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The size of level three is strongly affected by:

- Perceived foreign occupation of Muslim lands—although this factor is at work at every level of the Ziggurat, it is particularly important for level three.
- The actions of governments of Muslim countries, including economic mismanagement, corruption, and crackdowns on radicals.
- The ability of international organizations and networks to transport and train jihadist fighters.

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At level three and above, individuals may have come through *da'wa* organizations or attended jihadist training camps that included additional religious indoctrination. Their trust and loyalty lies largely with their jihadist "brothers." They trust clerics who are known in jihadist circles and consider anyone linked to the government as corrupt, including mainstream clerics.

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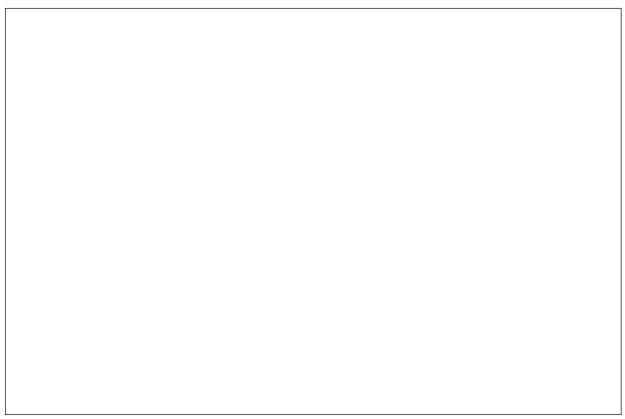

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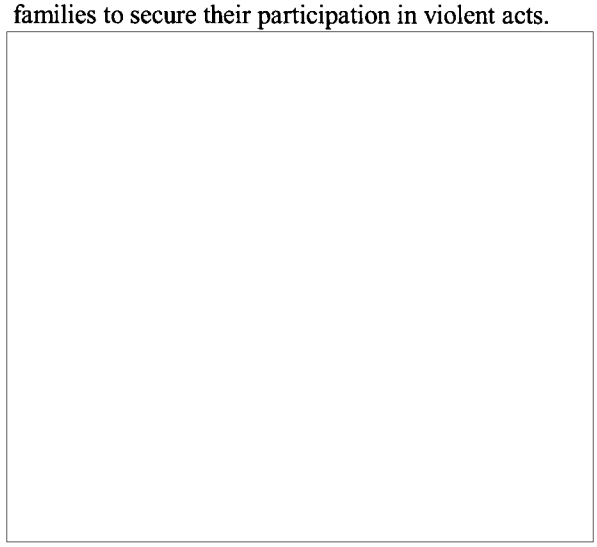
Propagandists at level four of the Ziggurat further develop the idea of reward for martyrs and their families to secure their participation in violent acts.



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Level Four—Jihad the Only Way To Fulfill Your Obligation to the *Umma*

Level four comprises largely terrorist groups who believe that the only way to establish Islamic states is through violence. Many of these groups were influenced by al-Qa'ida.[5] Their message is: the *umma* is under attack by the infidels and each Muslim has an **individual duty** to defend it, a duty that can only be fulfilled through jihad. Level-four rhetoric makes it clear that, for a Muslim, there is no act equivalent to jihad. Propagandists quote hadiths, or sayings of the Prophet, that convey this message or refer to the example of the Prophet:

- *"To stand in the line of Jihad for one hour is better than the worship of 60 years."* (Quotation from the Prophet Mohammed)
- *"If you march not forth, He will punish you with a painful torment and will replace you by another people."* (Surat al-Tawbah: 3)

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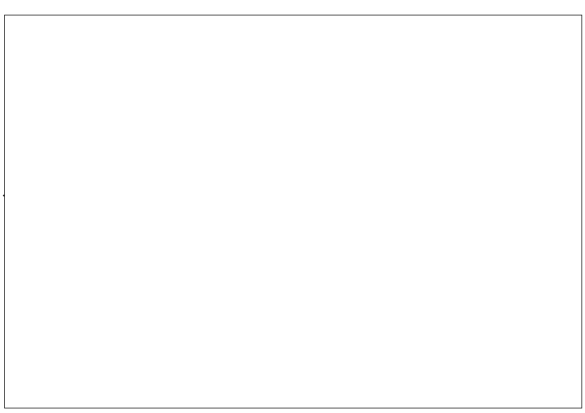
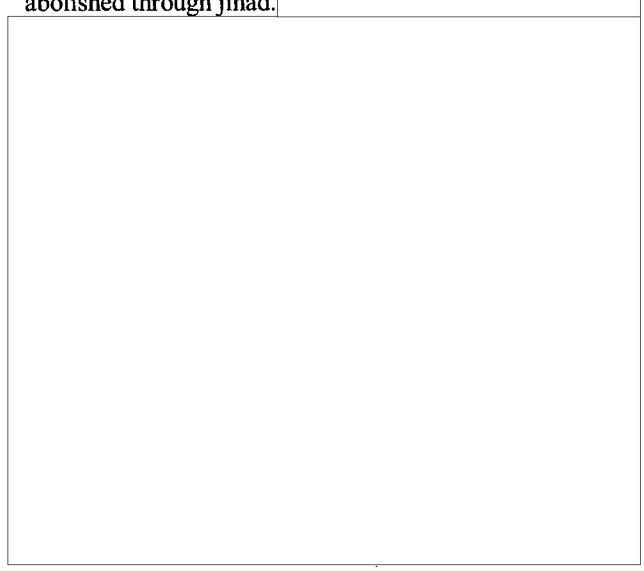


Level Five—Global Terrorists: If You Are not With Us, You Have Left the *Umma*

Al-Qa'ida is the primary occupant of level five, which comprises those who believe that Muslims are facing the greatest threat in their history, and they will not be safe until the entire nation-state system is abolished through jihad.



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Level five incorporates the beliefs of level four but makes the idea of obligation to the *umma* more specific and pressing. The enemy is sharply defined as the Jewish-Crusader Alliance—the United States and Israel, with the United States as the "head of the snake." The *umma* itself is limited to those who share al-Qa'ida's jihadi-Salafi beliefs. Examples of rhetoric include the following excerpts from public statements by Bin Ladin:

- "Whoever supports the United States, whether with medical facilities or anything else, commits an act of great infidelity that takes him out of the community of Muslims." (November 2002)

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- "Let each man come forth to kill these Jews and Americans because it is the most obligatory duty and the greatest sacrifice to kill them. . . . Do not seek anybody's advice on killing Americans. Proceed." (November 2002)

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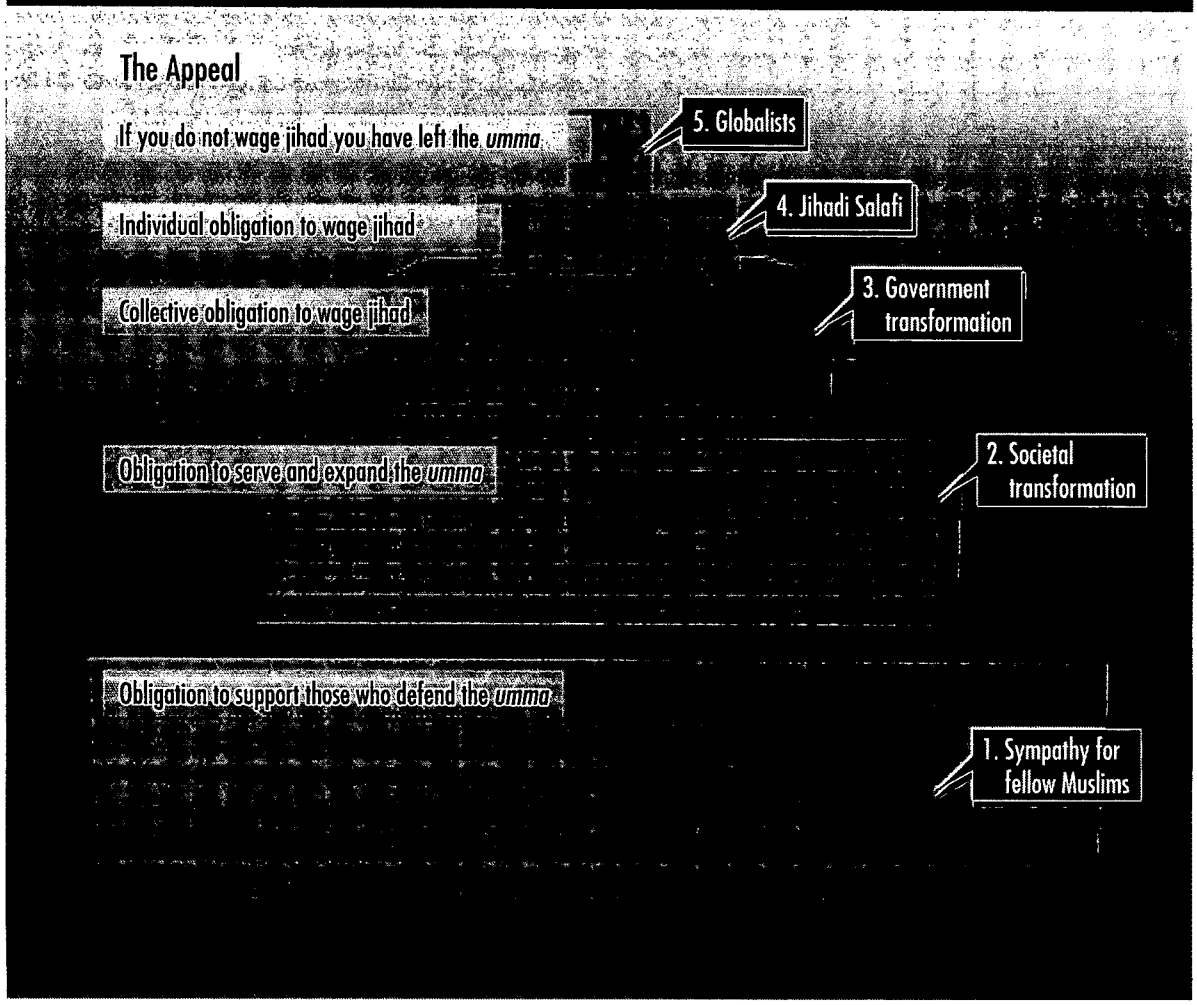
The Ziggurat of Zealotry [redacted] (b)(3)


The Appeal
If you do not wage jihad you have left the *umma*.
Individual obligation to wage jihad
Collective obligation to wage jihad
Obligation to serve and expand the *umma*
Obligation to support those who defend the *umma*
5. Globalists
4. Jihadi Salafi
3. Government transformation
2. Societal transformation
1. Sympathy for fellow Muslims

Level One: Individuals who support fellow Muslims simply because they are Muslim.

Example:
- Individuals who contribute to collection boxes in mosques or provide housing or other services to fellow muslims, "no questions asked."

Level Two: Groups and individuals who seek to transform society to conform to their vision of Islam, through peaceful means.

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Level Three: Islamic political parties who seek to create Islamic states through any means.

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Level Four: Jihadi Salafi, groups who believe that Islamic states can be created only through violence.

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Level Five: Globalists, jihadi salafis who believe that Islamic states can survive only if the global nation-state system is transformed.

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